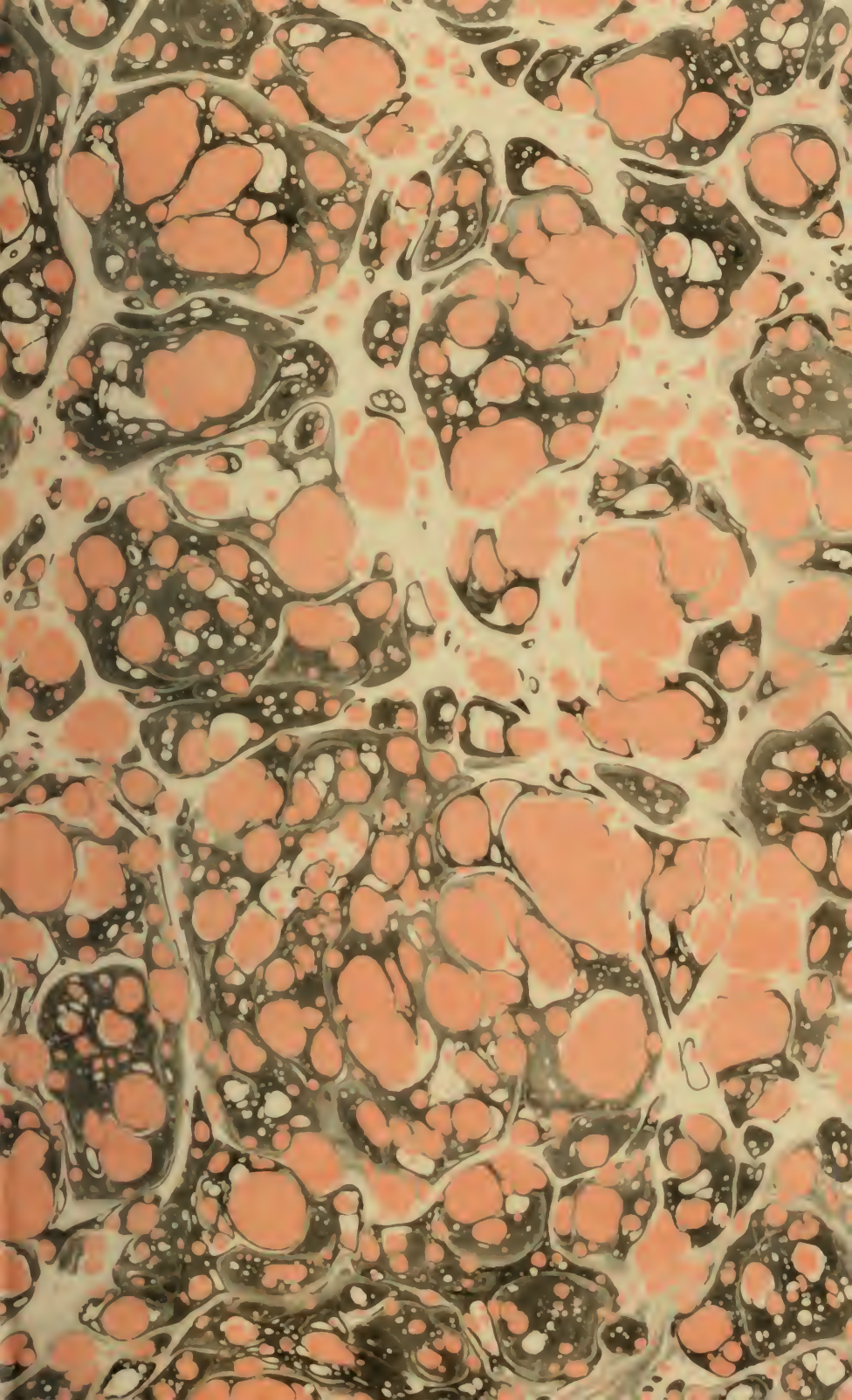




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Chas. Gray.

Dec^r 18th 1818.

from my Father

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A
L E T T E R
TO
SIR FRANCIS BURDETT, BART.
WITH
A CRITERION PROPOSED
TO
ASCERTAIN HIS PATRIOTISM,
AND
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF
REFORM.

Qui vero in urbe se commoverit, cujus ego non modo factum, sed inceptum ullum conatumve contra patriam deprehendero, sentiet in hac urbe esse Consules vigilantes, esse egregios Magistratus, esse fortem Senatum, esse Armā, esse Carcerem: quem vindicem nefariorum et manifestorum scelerum majores nostri esse voluerant.

Cicero, Orat. ii. in L. Catil. s. 12.

BY
A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. HATCHARD,
BOOKSELLER TO HER MAJESTY, 190, PICCADILLY.

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S. Gagnell, Printer, Little Queen Street, London.

L E T T E R,

&c.

THOUGH I am by no means disposed to rank you in the list of those great men whose character you affect to emulate; yet, as there are many who have been led to profess an admiration of your public conduct, and to look to you as a virtuous assertor of our rights and liberties; I beg leave to address a few remarks to you, which will express the sentiments of reflecting men, if not serve to illustrate the tendency of your political principles, and to furnish a criterion by which men may judge of your pretensions.

As there is no character more entitled to the esteem and gratitude of men than that of a true patriot, who stands up for the civil and religious liberties of his countrymen, with firmness and moderation; so there is certainly no impostor more vile and mischievous, than he who puts on the mask of patriotism for the purpose of indulging his own ambition and love of popularity—or even for the gratification of his speculative views, with-

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out regard to experience and the judgment of sober and considerate men.

Now, Sir, I confess, that, examining with the utmost impartiality the line which you have adopted in your political course, out of Parliament, I know not how to combat the remarks of those who declare, that they discover nothing in it, but what indicates either the want of judgment of a weak man, acting under the instigation of some insidious directors, and promoting their views of exciting popular discontent; or the intemperance of a wild ambition; which, in its eagerness to obtain distinction, reflects not that the security of every existing institution may be endangered, and the noblest structure of national happiness that ever was erected be destroyed.

Taking a view of the whole progress of the proceedings of you and your party, men complain that they behold not the dignified conduct of great statesmen, who endeavour by weight of argument, and well-weighed considerations, to promote, in their proper sphere of action, some reasonable plan of improvement of any part of the constitution, which might be judged to have sustained injury, or to be capable of amelioration; but the efforts of little minds, which delight to harangue at clubs, taverns, and popular meetings, where invective against the elevated ranks and higher departments of society are sure to be favourably received, and where vague and inflam-

matory declamation is listened to with an attention and favour, which just and temperate reflections can seldom obtain.

In examining the speeches, reported to have been delivered by you and your adherents on those occasions, I cannot but own that they often betray the arts and misrepresentations of factious declainers, who indulge themselves in unjust and indiscriminate invectives against all public characters, in loose and undefined clamours for reform, and in unfounded and exaggerated statements of public grievances.

Passing over, however, the general conduct of the party, I shall confine myself to a consideration of your proceedings in the recent concern, which has occasioned your commitment to the Tower, and upon which, with the most absurd flattery, your friends delude you with the promise of your being revered as an Hampden or a Sydney.

Taking up the subject from the commitment of Mr. Gale Jones, I confess that (not being perhaps sufficiently informed of the circumstances and motives that may have influenced Government) I am one of those who regret that the leaders of the House of Commons, upon this occasion, should have thought it necessary to direct any notice to the paltry debates from which he derived, I suppose, his subsistence; since, though the mode in which he proposed his subject was doubtless very offensive, I am of opinion, that freedom of exa-

mination, and as much latitude as possible, should be allowed to the people in canvassing the conduct of their representatives; and that at any rate the attending to him was only conspiring with the views of an insignificant man, by aiding him to obtain popular notice and favour.

Whether the House, in the legitimate exercise of its privileges, had a right to commit him to prison, was a question to be determined on the ground of precedent, by a reference to the history and proceedings of Parliament; and whatever opinions might be entertained as to the judgment exercised upon the occasion, the general classes of society were not qualified to determine whether the House, in this instance, had exceeded its lawful powers, and set up a claim unauthorized by precedent and not essential to its functions.

As to the declarations in Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, which have been brought forward, it is obvious that they only prohibit imprisonment inconsistently with the law of the land, and do not apply to measures professedly justified on an observance of the law and original constitution of Parliament; and if these declarations were carried to the extent to which they have been represented to apply, they would equally prohibit commitments for contempt of courts, or obstruction of their proceedings—a privilege enjoyed and exercised by every subordinate Court in the country. They, therefore, do not affect the question, whether the House of Commons should, for the maintenance

of its own dignity and authority, commit those who contumeliously degrade its character, and endeavour by defamatory misrepresentation to render it vile in the eyes of the people.

As the House of Commons in its wisdom had, after a fair examination of the subject, determined in favour of the claim, it was your duty, as a member of that House, to pay some deference to its authority, and not in the presumption and confidence of your own opinion to publish that weak and intemperate letter, which seemed to be designed only to degrade the character of a branch of the constitution, most essential to the interests of the country, and the measures of which, for a succession of years, have strengthened all the pillars and foundations of public liberty.

Or if you had deemed it necessary, in the cause of freedom, to dispute the claim, you might have supported Mr. Gale Jones in applying to the Courts for a writ of Habeas Corpus, to bring the question to a decision before competent judges, instead of rendering it an occasion to excite disturbances, and of appealing to the populace upon a subject on which they were not capable of deciding, the point being implicated with historical circumstances, and with considerations, which they were not likely to be informed of, or to appreciate with any coolness.

Your disrespectful conduct in the offensive remarks which you published, introduced the dis-

cussion of a right which had not before been questioned, with respect to the power of the House to commit one of its own members, a right indispensable for the maintenance of its authority, and which you yourself at first do not seem to have disputed.

Having entered the career of popularity, however, you knew not where to stop, and were disposed to break a lance with the Speaker; conceiving, I suppose, that his mace was not any very formidable weapon.

After the House had so fully determined that you deserved to be committed to the Tower, you must have known that your resistance to the warrant might endanger the safety of London, the lives of its inhabitants, and the peace and happiness of all who had any thing to lose, and without any possible advantage to the question which you meant to refer to the courts of justice.

If, instead of unworthily misleading the Sergeant at Arms, and deluding him to wait your convenience till the morning after he showed his authority, you had immediately agreed to accompany him, compelling him only to any such little act of force as would have satisfied for a fiction of law, you might have prevented a tumult disgraceful to the country, and have saved the effusion of blood; while the line of conduct which you adopted must, but for the great moderation of the military, have produced dreadful scenes,

The whole question involved in the dispute was not worth a life. The claim of the House, pushed to its utmost extent, has never been urged beyond the confinement of some mischievous individual for a few months; nor is there a reasonable fear of its ever being abused, whatever may be the chimerical expressions of alarm, that are hypocritically vented. The character of Parliament must not be contemptuously insulted, nor its jurisdiction subjected to subordinate courts; and where can a discretionary power of punishing libels and obstructions be more safely vested than in the delegated representatives of the people, who at a limited period must resign their power, who consist of various parties, and who have no interest which is not intimately connected with that of the community? The people, in this instance, have been deluded to contend against privileges essential to their own security.

A love of liberty, a jealous and vigilant regard to its support, is honourable and becoming; but beyond this, there is a spurious affectation of it, which is mere profession, and results from licentiousness.

The proceedings which have been instigated, and the clamorous conduct of the clubs and cabals which concur with you, and in which reason and common sense cannot obtain a fair hearing, are expressive of such licentiousness. They may hurry your deluded admirers and followers into destruc-

tion; but their tendency on the considerate and leading members of society can only be to unite the real friends of the country round the existing institutions, under which we have enjoyed most remarkable happiness and prosperity.

When you consider what respectable friends you have lost, and how much you have suffered in the esteem even of the warmest advocates for liberty, you will derive, I should conceive, but little consolation from the reflection, that you are extolled as a paragon of virtue by Mr. Favel and Mr. Waithman; that the present Chief Magistrate of the city, or his fair daughter, may have wreathed a chaplet for your brow; and that deluded multitudes are prepared, it is said, to drag your triumphal car on the day of your liberation, and to tyrannize over the peaceable inhabitants of London, in compelling them to do homage to a demagogue whom they may, perhaps, reprobate or despise.

I should imagine also, that it cannot be a very gratifying subject of reflection to you to call to mind that several lives have already been lost from the effects of the tumult which prevailed; but I fear that you have not many compunctious visitings of humanity upon this occasion, and that your light mind is rather occupied in contemplating the honours which you have received from the rabble of Westminster, and the mob which called itself the Independent Electors of Middlesex.

Your ambition appears to be that of exhibiting

yourself a most interesting object, “en grand spectacle,” to the country: for this, I suppose, the minute detail of your proceedings was published; your ride; your letter to the Sheriff; the breakfast party of your lady and her noble relations, so ostentatiously described in the papers; with the pretty picture of your son reading *Magna Charta*. Sir, if you had been looking over Virgil with him, a book more suited to and customary for boys of his age, you might, perchance, by the *Sortes Virgilianæ*, have had your attention led to a passage very apposite to the circumstances in which you were placed, and which might have suggested to you a line of conduct far more honourable than that which you chose to adopt. The passage I allude to is as follows:

*Ac, veluti magno in populo cum sæpe coorta est
Seditio, sævitque animis ignobile vulgus;
Jamque faces et saxa volant; furor arma ministrat:
Tum pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem
Conspexere, silent, arrectisque auribus adstant;
Ille regit dictis animos, et pectora mulcet.*

If you had been disposed to act the part of a grave and respectable man, you would have come out to the assembled people; would have exhorted them peaceably to disperse; have told them that it was your intention to surrender to the warrant of the Speaker, though you might afterwards be disposed to contest its legality; that

their interference could not tend to any good purpose, but might be productive of mischief.

This would have been a conduct which would have excited just and permanent esteem, though it might not have procured for you the address carried to you by the Sheriff and degraded Member for Middlesex; or the other preposterous procession of a Sheriff, with which you were gratified, when, in his state carriage and official pomp, he conveyed the delegated majesty of the Lord Mayor and Council to the Tower. Sir, whatever you may think of the mummerly of honours which have been paid to you, they exhibit but a contemptible burlesque, of which the respectable part of the community is ashamed. We may collect what are the sentiments of the considerate members of the Livery of London upon some of the measures which have been adopted, from their temperate and becoming Declarations, which exhibit a striking contrast to the Resolutions of the Common Hall; and if the opinions of the really independent Electors of Middlesex were fairly collected, you would soon see that they would be of a very different description from those of the men who shout at your name, some of whom are probably the quondam proprietors of the mill at Isleworth, of most honourable memory.

Your conduct, and that of your associates, upon this occasion, offensive as it would be at all

times, is the more inconsistent, even with the presence of patriotism, at this period, as it has a direct and necessary tendency to promote dissension in the country, at a time when we are engaged in a most arduous contest with a formidable enemy. The tumultuous proceedings and wild effusions of a republican spirit will doubtless gratify Buonaparte and his deluded Parisians.

Hoc Ithacus velit et magno mercentur Atridæ.

They may, perhaps, form a wrong notion from them, as they did once before, since, as Mr. Burke observed, in his celebrated *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, “ The vanity, restlessness, petulance, and spirit of intrigue, of several petty cabals, who attempt to hide their total want of consequence in bustle and noise, and puffing and mutual quotation of each other, may make them imagine that our contemptuous neglect of their abilities is a mark of general acquiescence in their opinions: but no such thing. Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chirp, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the English oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those are the only inhabitants of the field; that of course they are many in number; and that, after all, they are any other than the little, shrivelled, meagre, hopping,

“ though loud and troublesome, insects of the “ hour*.” And this conviction might be maintained, if even, as on the former occasion, these querulous insects should make a noise in every provincial town, since in every place there are men disposed to manifest their resentment against the respectable part of the community for the disesteem in which they are viewed, and to lay hold of every subject that may afford a pretence for clamour and discontent, and favour the interest of the opposition parties which always exist: fortunately, however, they have not ventured out in many places against the strong indignation which has been generally felt at the disturbances excited in the capital.

Common report speaks well of your domestic worth: for myself, I am not accustomed to separate public from private virtues in my estimate of character. I do not dispute, however, that, as far as mere affections are concerned, you may be a good father and a good husband; but the influence of your example I cannot consider as beneficial to any circle; and if your domestic qualities are to be urged in palliation of your political misconduct, they may be execrated. We may say,

“ Curse on his virtues, they’ve undone his country.”

It is not, you will observe, Sir, so much that I complain of you for entertaining a wish to see

* Burke's Works, vol. iii. p. 22.

what you call a Reform in Parliament, or that you dispute the right of the House of Commons to commit for a libel, or for contempt; but that you act not by fair means and constitutional exertions in Parliament, but, as Mr. Burke expresses himself, “sacrificing all ideas of dignity to an ambition without a distinct object, you work with low instruments;” by which, in fact, the whole composition of your cause is injured, and men are led to wish that your violent proceedings, by which the public mind is agitated, and the lower classes excited to tumultuous conduct, should be put a stop to by the exercise of authority; and many would rather the military should be constantly employed, and even the strict line of constitutional restraint be transgressed, than that dangerous tumults should be tolerated; so that, in fact, such men as yourself are the greatest enemies to freedom, and make us prefer even arbitrary power to the despotic excesses of a mob. The conduct which has been witnessed in the recent disposition of your adherents, has certainly produced much dissatisfaction, and a peculiar gloom, which has showed itself not only in the public prints, but in the countenance and conversation of most men.

What might be the consequences, if you and your partizans were not checked by the proper exertion of authority, and by the good sense of the country, can hardly be estimated. What ima-

gination, however gloomy, could have foreseen the accumulated miseries which have resulted from the French Revolution, to France and to the world? Who, at the commencement, could have dreamed of the extent of wickedness and folly to which the inflamed passions of men have hurried them? Many, indeed, as now in this country, might have apprehended that fearful effects would result from the principles which were observed to operate; but the evils of anarchy and disorder are eventually greater than the strongest apprehension can forebode.

If you and your abettors had intentions of prosecuting your measures by violence, and wished to have a free scope, you could not have acted more consistently with such views, than by endeavouring to prevent the introduction of the military, and by contending that the civil force is sufficient, as this might enable you to dupe and delude the public to become an easy prey to a lawless mob upon any occasion on which you might draw them forth; ever ready as they are to act where there may be a chance of pillage. All your measures, however, it seems are to be subservient to the introduction of your favourite plan of Reform, the effect of which, I suppose, would be to throw the whole representation of the country into popular elections, and in a short time to introduce a democracy.

Willing in candour to believe that you have no

bad intentions, and admitting that you may possibly be influenced only by a patriotic wish to introduce a more pure and uncorrupt spirit into the House of Commons, I call upon you to bring forward the plan by which this is to be effected. This, Sir, is the criterion of your patriotism which I require; and as you have withdrawn yourself from Parliament, so that you cannot, with any shadow of consistency, appear in it again while constituted as it now is, publish what your specific objects are, instead of venting your vague declamations against what has so long existed. If you have any plan, in which there is a due respect to property in the representative system, produce it; let it be considered, whether we are to sacrifice a constitution, of which the practical benefits have been ascertained, to one of speculative contrivance; but if you have the good of your country at heart, do not call in the mob to your assistance, or the aid of those wild men who are

Agreed in nothing but t' abolish,
 Subvert, extirpate, and demolish;
 To tug at both ends of the saw,
 To bear down government and law.

Such men will extol you while you concur with them; and when you have led them to a certain pitch, and will not proceed, they will desert you, and sacrifice you to some more violent leader. This is the invariable effect of such combinations.

* You have no right to consider Parliament averse

to any reasonable improvement, because it has rejected the many crude schemes which from time to time have been proposed. It may be convinced, notwithstanding your opinions, that, with every regard to the people, too much weight must not be thrown into their scale. It may have learnt, that as states verge to democracy, they do not proportionably improve in virtue; that Rome was agitated by dissensions whenever the popular power predominated, and was frequently compelled to have recourse to the despotic authority of a Dictator to quell disturbances which threatened the destruction of the state; and that the republics of Greece were subjected to external enemies by their factious and corrupt leaders.

To defer to the authority of the people at large is indeed only to subject the multitude to the guidance of a few, who by their arts and influence direct its passions—a remark which has been fully illustrated by the fate of all elective governments.

The political discontent, which has prevailed in this country for these two last years, has been industriously excited by very scandalous arts, and has produced an apprehension greater than any that could result from the changes and revolutions which have taken place on the Continent, as they may be thought to affect ourselves, since, whatever extension of power may have attended the success of Buonaparte, it has not hitherto injured

our prosperity, or increased the alarm which we felt at invasion; on the contrary, the conflicts which have taken place between our forces and his in Portugal and Spain, have diminished the fears which we entertained of the superiority of his military tactics, which had previously produced so much alarm; and his dominion, however extended, and however it may have effected some good purposes in the first instance, is so oppressive and so hostile to the general interests of the lands over which it is established, as to be radically unsound, whatever appearance of strength it may exhibit.

The agitation which took place on the proceedings against the Duke of York was artfully excited by ambitious men, in order to offer a chance of disturbance, and was employed to lessen the respect entertained by the people for Parliament. The same party, which had laboured to produce a disturbance by assailing the prerogative of the Crown, when they found that the King was deservedly too popular to admit of any chance of success in depreciating the moderation of his government, endeavoured to draw hopes of mischief from lowering the popular branch of the constitution in the estimation of the public.

The measures of Parliament, however, in that inquiry furnished no ground of complaint, excepting to those who were equally harsh and unjust in their views, since those measures certainly mani-

fested as strong proofs of its independency as ever were displayed at periods most auspicious to our liberty, though not expressive of those violent resolutions which were recommended by some violent and disaffected men.

Other very strong proofs of the integrity and right spirit of Parliament, and of its disposition to inquire into and to correct abuses, have been manifested, to the satisfaction of all, I believe, who are not influenced by a turbulent and unreasonable mind, or disposed to clamour for objects of speculative and unattainable perfection.

If the statement of facts, and of actual retrenchments of the most important and extensive operation, furnished in Mr. Rose's pamphlet, will not convince us that much has been effected, we must be unwilling to acknowledge and determined to deny the truth. I do not dispute that the Ministers of the present day, like those of other times, have betrayed sometimes a want of judgment in their public measures, and they may have been supported or screened by majorities perhaps unduly biassed; but this would be the case, of whatever classes of men Parliament might be constituted. Ministers are liable to error like other men, and no assembly could be collected not subject to party feeling and the influence of human passions. The House of Commons consists of men distinguished for birth, talents, and virtues, and is composed of members for almost

every rank of life ; and if we cannot find abilities and virtues among them, I know not where we are to look. Nothing is certainly more offensive than the hypocritical and canting cry excited, and in which you have loudly joined, and which has been echoed and re-echoed by turbulent declaimers on all sides, against the corruption and imbecility of all public men, as if virtue had on a sudden fled to the skies, and left not even a vestige upon earth ; as if

*Fugere pudor verumque fidesque,
In quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolique ;*

as if honour and uncorrupt patriotism were to be found only in Mr. Waithman's shop, or in the cabinet-council of Mr. Horne Tooke.

As to the complaint of a deficiency of men of elevated powers of mind with the knowledge and endowments of great statesmen, it may be admitted that no individual stands upon such pre-eminence as to command an entire ascendancy, and to unite all voices in the admiration and support of his transcendent authority ; neither indeed are there any leaders of particular parties who are so decidedly superior to those with whom they act as to rival Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox in their reputation and influence ; but it is to be considered, that these eminent men gained their high and commanding stations under particular circumstances, when party views united different interests, in slow and gradual associations, under one

head, and disposed men to acquiesce in the authority which resulted from the combined influence of high descent, talents, and worth.

When great political parties are once broken up, it requires some time to dispose them to subjection to a new head, and those who have performed a subordinate part cannot immediately establish a pre-eminence; and, after all, it undoubtedly requires a combination of rare and various qualities to become the leader of a party.

Mr. Fox, with his great talents for parliamentary debate and political negotiation, had a frankness and a conciliatory disposition, which lessened envy, and engaged general affection. The defects which are imputed to him, though they were of serious importance in the estimate of his religious and moral character, and lessened him in the judgment of dispassionate men, were so palliated to common observation by natural gentleness of manners and an apparent probity in his principles, that they seem to have been forgotten in the general admiration of him which prevailed.

Mr. Pitt, in his dignified independence, in his elevated and unsuspected integrity, and with his unprecedented powers of intellect, being known uniformly to pursue the great object of his country's welfare, subdued all competition.

But though there is now a want of men of such established reputation, to give weight and im-

portance to the direction of public affairs, and to excite a strong confidence in the name of those who are responsible for the government and welfare of the state, at critical and momentous periods, it by no means follows that there is any deficiency in the general talents and virtues of the country ; and looking, as I do, with unfeigned respect to the firmness and moderation of Mr. Perceval, to his undoubted probity, to his conscientious and disinterested principles, and to his well-regulated and splendid abilities, exerted without parade, in proportion to the occasion which calls them forth (not to mention the many other able men who are associated with him) ; I do not see either justice or candour in the cry, so often repeated, against the imbecility of Administration, without any sufficient warrant from the instances of failure which are adduced.

But whatever sentiments may be entertained as to this or any other set of men, it is unquestionably a base and licentious spirit, which endeavours to degrade the whole character of the political body, and to represent the Government and all parties as corrupt.

Those who are too eager to impute evil should consider, that if, as they state, corruption cankers the whole heart, and spreads its baneful and leprous influence over every department of the state, but little advantage can result from any change of government or representation of the country. The

same spirit will operate under any form and constitution of things. The evil principle must be in the whole body, and in every individual member. The eagerness for selfish advantage must result from the dissipation and extravagance of the age, and would not be corrected by any alteration of system, since it would be impossible to vest power where it would be precluded from opening sources of private emolument.

It is idle to suppose that, under any constitution of things, temptation can be entirely cut off;—regulate government upon the most economical principles—reduce its offices to the smallest possible number, and pare off the emoluments upon the narrowest plan, yet objects of ambition and means of profit will still be discovered.

It is a miserable policy, which would drive men to indirect measures of advantage, and divest public offices of that reasonable splendour which is consistent with the dignity of the country.

If sufficient advantage do not attach to public station, secret profits will be sought, and clandestine resources opened. What was the consequence of the narrow economy of the Grecian states in withholding emoluments from their public functionaries? Their leading men became pensioners of foreign powers, and their orators exerted their venal eloquence in favour of interests adverse to their country.

In this kingdom, indeed, in corrupt times, the effect of the scanty and precarious appointments assigned to leading offices, appears to have driven even the confidential Ministers of the Crown, if not the Sovereign himself, into scandalous cabals and disgraceful subserviency to the designs of foreign states.

It may be added also, that the complaints, which affect the government of the country, are often indiscriminately directed against objects which furnish no just subject of censure.

The great causes of expenditure are the vast military and naval establishments. The former of these must plead in excuse for its extent the peculiar danger of the country from the present state of Europe; though it might perhaps be reduced, at least for a few weeks in the year, by permitting a portion of the soldiers to return home for labour, at the same time relinquishing their pay: and, with respect to the latter, our commercial property and our security are at all times so dependent upon its maintenance, that but little difference of sentiment need be apprehended.

It may be confessed, indeed, that the great exertions now made for the assistance of Spain, Portugal, and Sicily, are attended with considerable expense and very precarious advantage; and one cannot but feel some regret at being engaged to support governments deplorably weak in themselves, and connected with the maintenance of

civil and religious institutions very unfriendly to the happiness of mankind. We must be consoled in these points by the consideration that we fulfil our engagements at least, and learn experimentally that the French are formidable chiefly from the disunion and imbecility of the powers which they attack.

All, however, must now be sensible, that it is the interest of this country, as far as it is consistent with its fidelity to existing engagements, to confine its efforts to defensive measures, to avoid foreign enterprises and conquests, and to lower our military establishment to the standard requisite for defence and the maintenance of our possessions; to stop, as soon as may be, the system of subsidy; and to draw from economy sources of supply for a protracted and expensive warfare.

That the manner in which the money of the country is expended, in every department, should be vigilantly examined, and all private peculation, as much as possible, prevented, there can be no doubt. Some alterations likewise, and much reduction of expenditure, may certainly be effected: whatever changes, however, are to be introduced, should be brought forward with circumspection and judgment, and by regular and constitutional measures. Let the specific abuse be pointed out, and rectified by legitimate authorities, without general and indiscriminate clamour.

Meantime, it is not the wish of prudent men

that any thing should be done to destroy the lustre of the Crown, or to lower the respectability and impression of the principal departments of the state.

Some evils may unquestionably be corrected, without destruction to that reasonable influence which the Crown should possess from patronage and the disposal of honourable and lucrative situations, as a reward and encouragement to men of merit.

Persons, however, who distinguish themselves, and who devote their talents to the service of the country, who represent its dignity and entertain foreigners resorting to it, should be furnished with liberal and sufficient means to enable them to maintain the consequence of a great nation, the interests of which cannot be regulated in the parsimonious spirit of a petty republic.

As to the clamours upon this subject, expressed by a few noisy and turbulent men, it is palpable from what motives they arise; for who are those gentlemen who would assume to themselves a peculiar purity, and an exclusive spirit of patriotism? Do they imagine that the country is blind to their characters, or ignorant that they employ their declamation as a mere stalking-horse to screen their ambition and mischievous designs?

The men who are loudest in vilifying Government are often themselves the veriest servants of corruption, actuated by selfish views, and disposed

to risk every thing in pursuit of their crude and visionary plans.

Their loose and profligate principles are deserving of the strongest reprehension; their objects cannot be mistaken, and they would formerly have called forth strong measures of coercion. “Fuit, fuit, ista quondam in hac republica virtus at viri fortes acrioribus suppliciis civem perniciosum quam acerbissimum hostem coercerent.” The leader of these men may be convinced of the effect of their speeches on discerning minds, by the impression which they produce in the House of Commons, which may be conceived to be mortifying enough to those who look to the approbation of any meeting beyond that of the Crown and Anchor.

There is nothing more offensive in the political circumstances of the day, than to see a tavern committee of reform erecting its tribunal and sitting in judgment upon the whole government of the country, proclaiming authoritatively their views of innovation, disparaging a Legislature which has raised the nation to the highest prosperity and reputation, of which the acts for successive generations are the noblest monuments of wisdom which ever were raised by the collective efforts of any country, and of which the integrity has never been excelled by that of any legislative assembly that has existed.

To a miserable state of degradation must this

nation be reduced, if it is to be directed by the councils of the Crown and Anchor cabinet, composed, as it seems to be, of the disciples of Tom Paine, Horne Tooke, and Cobbett, of visionary theorists, who would be renovators and legislators; who, when exulting in the cheerings of their mob, and intoxicated with noise and bad wine, pronounce their opinions with farcical importance upon their Sovereign and all the departments of state, and expect to be revered as the only pure and enlightened patriots. Such, it is hoped, have no real weight; their first measures betray the weakness of their understandings and the mischief of their designs; and those who, in their preposterous theories, would exclude all official men from the House of Commons, and throw all elections upon public meetings, are not likely to be allowed to legislate for this great and commercial country, for the government of which other talents are required than those which influence popular assemblies: meanwhile, their bold and peremptory assertions inflame the minds of the unthinking multitude, and stimulate the disaffected.

It is seriously to be lamented, that at such a period, when the establishment of an uncontrolled tyranny on the continent is to be apprehended, any Englishmen should be found disposed to hazard our safety by disunion, and to weaken the strength of the only bulwark and asylum for the liberties of the world.

The clamour which was excited on account of the Duke of York particularly struck some foreigners of distinction, who were here last year, and who had witnessed the progress and effects of the revolutionary spirit on the continent :—they urged the necessity of caution—they thought that they saw circumstances of alarm, which threatened a storm similar to that which they had witnessed ; —a systematical degradation of the Royal Family, and of the higher orders of society—an exaggerated statement of every subject of complaint, and a decrying of all public characters ; and indeed, though sufficient reliance may be placed upon the good sense which prevails in this country, to justify us in confiding that it will not sacrifice solid prosperity and distinguished advantages for speculative views of improvement ; yet disturbances may be excited, and the unthinking populace be hurried into excesses which must terminate in their destruction or sufferings.

It is indeed a wonderful proof of the discontent and wickedness of men, that they should indulge in the expression of dissatisfaction, when surrounded by such great and pre-eminent blessings as are enjoyed in this country, and should even bring themselves coolly to meditate the destruction of a prosperity, which, without exaggeration, may be stated to exceed any that has ever been possessed by any age or nation.

The disaffected and insolent spirit, which has

burst forth in such violent and insulting language against the House of Commons, it is to be apprehended, derived its first origin and countenance from the extravagant and intemperate terms in which opposition parties are accustomed to stigmatize the existing administrations of the country. When men of the highest rank and situation are treated in a manner so contemptuous, and their conduct is brought forward with derision to the public, every shopman and apprentice is led lightly to esteem them, and it is certainly an unbecoming and mischievous abuse of parliamentary freedom to indulge in such bitter derision, which is productive of mischievous effect, while it does not at all alter the real character of measures, or even promote the objects which the opposition parties have in view ; who themselves, in turn, become subject to the same misrepresentation.

The injury which may result to the public, and the clamour which may be raised by such means, against men who have the most distinguished claims to respect and gratitude, cannot be more strongly illustrated than by the prejudice which has been so unfairly excited against Mr. Yorke.

With respect to the eternal theme of declamation, the height of the taxation, which is a subject indeed upon which the feelings of men are ever warmly interested, I can conscientiously declare, that I think that it is not only not greater than the wealth of the country can well bear, but that it is

lighter, in proportion to circumstances, than that of every other country in Europe; and that in one respect it is beneficial, as it operates as a check upon luxury, which otherwise would be carried to an unlimited extent.

It certainly does not essentially destroy the comfort of any class, since it is notorious the middle and lower ranks of society possess means of enjoyment beyond what has ever been experienced, and that, with much less effort and industry than has formerly been witnessed.

The taxation, while it supplies ail our wants and furnishes means for the liquidation of the national debt, highly satisfactory, is nothing equal to that which prevails in France, though every scheme is there resorted to, to derive sources from the vices of the people, and the trade is so taxed, while all foreign commerce is discouraged, that every individual page in every tradesman's book of accounts must, I am assured, be stamped, before the payment of any single article which is sold can be claimed.

Could it be expected, that after so many years of a protracted war, with scarcely an ally who is not rather the object of our generous support than of any assistance to us, we should continue to enjoy our increasing prosperity—that our resources should enlarge with our necessities, and our commerce increase by the very means which are raised to obstruct it? Could it be expected that our revenues should so improve, that our enlarged expenditure

should be supported without any additional taxation? that, with the world against us, and an enormous debt, long accumulated, we should be allowed by those who are least inclined to countenance favourable representations, to have taxes more light and less oppressively and vexatiously collected than any other country*, and that we are in possession of a sinking fund, which gives the best assurance of liquidating the present debt, and of affording security against any future accumulation to any ruinous extent. The prosperity and commercial advantages, which we enjoy, have diffused a general opulence through all departments of society. The children of the poor are better clothed and fed, their houses are better furnished, and their tables better covered, than they have ever been at any preceding time. It is to be regretted only, that some of the resources of Government are drawn from distilleries and lotteries, which sadly administer to the destruction of their health and morals.

If taxes are high, it is because the expenses of Government, for our protection and safety, are enlarged. Where those expenses have been increased by peculation and embezzlement there is just subject indeed for complaint, and proper remedies and corrections should be applied; but it is the height of madness to incur the risk of the loss of the advantage which we possess for any

* See Edinburgh Review, article Code of Conscription.

views of precarious improvement. Let those who clamour for change pause, and reflect what would be the consequence if the flood-gates of innovation were opened by the populace, whom they would inflame. They themselves, as usually happens, would be swept away in the first rush. The movers of popular disturbance are generally themselves first sacrificed, because they will not lead on to the extent of mischief which their followers are inclined to promote.

It is vain, however, to urge these considerations to those who are bent upon introducing their own schemes; who having been mortified in their vanity, because not allowed to take a lead in the higher offices of state, would risk any consequences if they themselves can but become important.

Such men attempt to justify their own violence by charging others with an unwillingness to adopt alterations, however beneficial; but the truth is, that their demonstration is not always satisfactory, and "*Voila mes preuves*" sometimes excites only a smile.

They pretend also, that the spirit of the people of this country would be more moderate in a revolution than that of other nations less calm and philosophical; but it is to be feared, that those who imagine that the lower classes, when their passions are kindled, would be regulated by any principles of moderation, might as well flatter themselves that the waves of the ocean would sub-

side at their feet, when so commanded ; or that, like supernatural beings, they could “ ride in the “ whirlwind and direct the storm.”

Let us not be deluded and misled by men, whose measures are not directed to the correction of abuses by regular means and legitimate authority ; who, as Mr. Tierney observed, would probably wish that evils should not be redressed by Parliament, in order that its character may sink in public estimation, and their empirical aid be required—that Government may be lessened in the eyes of the vulgar, and the great renovators of principle, who are to restore a golden age, be called into action.

Upon the whole, the reflecting part of the community see no reason why this prosperous country is to be put into confusion, because our foreign expeditions on the continent have failed, as they almost always do, and because some presumptuous gentlemen are desirous of exhibiting their skill in new-moulding the frame of our constitution, having been toasted, and *three times three'd*, at taverns, till they fancy themselves capable of being legislators, though they have not knowledge and experience enough to frame a bill for a few objects of parochial regulation, and would mislead the people, to make them believe that they are friends of liberty, while they seek to deprive their representatives of privileges which are essential to the

maintenance of their respectability and independence.

We rejoice that Parliament, with a spirit and temper that does infinite credit to it, and which is daily raising it in the estimation of a discerning public, asserts its rights in a calm and dignified manner; and we have no doubt, but by its authority, by the vigilance of respectable magistracy, the pure and unimpeached justice and prudence of the Courts, and the good sense of the country; and above all, by the protection of Providence, those gentlemen will be entirely defeated; and as they are so dissatisfied with a country and constitution which every true patriot must love, we would recommend to them to transport themselves, where they may enjoy more popular forms of government, and assist in the liberation of nations oppressed and insulted by the grossest tyranny, by men who began by clamouring for liberty, and who still mock the people with its illusions.

Whatever defects may have crept in by time, we trust will be corrected by those constitutional means of reform, which happily ensure the preservation of our liberty, while they rectify any abuses that arise.

The spirit of fraud and speculation, which has appeared sometimes in different departments, derives, I am convinced, no countenance from the authority of Government. The House of Commons appears to have done, or to be doing, every thing that can

be required for its correction, every precise subject of complaint is investigated, and Parliament refuses to listen only to vague and indiscriminate charges.

Public peculators and defaulters have been prosecuted, and compelled not only to refund their unjust gains, but consigned to deserved imprisonment. Committees have been appointed to investigate every trace of imposition, and to point out remedies which will gradually be adopted; and though unquestionably some very shameful practices and unjustifiable frauds have prevailed among contractors and subordinate agents, yet in the high official trusts of the state, and in situations which might be supposed to have afforded opportunities of speculation, little or no subject of complaint has been found to exist, even where the whole spirit of party has been directed to the exposure of supposed delinquents.

It is idle to expect, that in the dependencies of a great government there should be no abuses; all that can be looked for is, that they should be corrected wherever they can be discovered.

There can be no doubt that Parliament is pledged to this, by the most sacred obligations; but what, if new evils rise up with Protean versatility, is all confidence to be given up, and all character vilified? The public indignation is justly excited by the attempt which has been made to effect this; and Parliament, by the union of its

strength and the assertion of its spirit, is rapidly recovering its weight in public opinion.

With respect to the notion of reform, as far as we can judge of the ideas attached to it by modern declaimers at popular meetings, and which it seems is to introduce a radical and total change, it is framed without any regard to fact, experience, or argument; and though it is represented to be a palladium, and it is required that the walls of the constitution should be broken down to receive it, it is in fact as great a monster as the Trojan horse, filled with ruffians, who are to destroy the peaceable inhabitants when buried in sleep.—The structure which they rear is not framed, however, by the aid of Minerva, but contains

Non bene junctarum discordia semina rerum.

It is probable, that many who clamour for it have not any distinct conception upon the subject, and merely avail themselves of it, with a view to advance themselves in popularity or interest. Indeed there are scarcely any ten men of sense in the kingdom who dispassionately agree upon any change as likely to prove advantageous.

That no benefit would accrue to the country or to the constitution of Parliament, by throwing a great number of members upon popular elections, is sufficiently clear—corruption of manners would only be increased by it. In what respect are the borough members inferior to those of the counties

or commercial towns? It does not appear that the bold and enterprising men who would be likely to succeed with public assemblies would form the best legislators; neither, in point of fact, are the members of counties, though frequently men of property, and the proper representatives of the landed interest, more distinguished either for talents or virtues than the other members of the House.

If it be meant to rescind altogether what are called corrupt boroughs, the doors of Parliament must be closed against men of diffidence and unassuming worth, who have not interest enough to command an ascendancy in counties or popular towns; had such boroughs indeed not existed, a Burke and a Grattan might have been excluded.

Commercial men also, and persons who may be supposed to represent what is called the monied interest, and who are extremely useful in concerns of finance, trade, and domestic economy, would have few or no opportunities of admission.

It cannot be said that such will be returned by commercial towns, since this is rarely the case. Bristol, for instance, which might be expected to choose men of such experience, who are acquainted with the interests and local circumstances of the place, has generally elected strangers; and we have seen two military gentlemen for successive Parliaments the representatives of Liverpool.

The idea that a regard should be had to the

fluctuations in population, and a reference to local claims, as to proportion in representation, is perfectly trifling and absurd. The members of the House neither do nor ought to consider themselves as the representatives of particular places, having a distinct interest from the community, and bounden to regard their particular wishes, any further than as they consist with the general welfare of the state; but as legislators who are to consult together for the good of the whole country upon fair and general principles: the more their return depends upon a regard to the views of particular communities, or upon attention to objects of temporary regulation, the more are members led to sacrifice concerns of great and national importance to petty and partial interests.

The experienced wisdom of Parliament is well employed in detecting this disposition wherever it appears, either in the measures of a member for a county or for a borough-town; and the spirit of true policy should ever be anxious to defeat it.

The wish foolishly expressed by some to exclude official men from Parliament is indeed in the present circumstances of the country incapable of being indulged; it would unhinge the whole structure of Government, and disturb all its organization. It never could have been suggested, but in the conviction of its impracticability, and with a view to excite clamour and discontent. Whatever might be the notions of former times upon this subject,

such an exclusion of the immediate agents of the executive government would be inconsistent with the discussion of the interests of an extensive empire, and the proper management of its financial and commercial concerns.

If seventy-two members of the House hold places to the amount of one hundred and eighty thousand pounds, as has been stated, with a silly affectation of some triumphant argument against the independency of Parliament, I see nothing to substantiate any just grounds of suspicion, or to alarm the country.

With respect to the wish for triennial parliaments, which has been again suggested by a few presumptuous and unreflecting men, it is evident enough, that the animosities already occasioned by elections are scarcely done away by the time that parliaments are renewed, and that once in seven years, with the opportunities afforded occasionally by a premature dissolution, is quite sufficient for a scene of general riot and intoxication.

And what advantage would result on the score of uncorruptness by a diminution of the time of sessions? Men would only endeavour to complete in a short time the objects to which they would not fail to look, while a perpetual fluctuation of principles would prevail. No time would be allowed for the acquisition of experience, and those who had obtained knowledge would be obliged to

leave their stations when they were beginning to put in practice what they had learned.

The frenzy of pretended reformers will not, therefore, I trust, be allowed to disturb our tranquillity.

There is, we have seen, in the constitutional appointments of the state, a power to remedy defects ; and is there a specific subject of complaint, which may and will not be attended to, when it is fairly pointed out and acknowledged by the public conviction ?

We are not, however, to believe every thing which is asserted by these haranguers in taverns, who find it more easy to agitate such a collection of heated men, than to persuade the enlightened assembly of the House of Commons, upon which their hypocritical cant can excite only disgust and contempt.

The Parliament itself, we have seen, seems inclined faithfully and steadily to discharge its duties at a trying time, while it vindicates its dignity and claim to respect. The rallying of men of all parties round its authority ; the decided majorities by which it has rejected insulting petitions, however artfully worded ; and the suggestions of men who conspire with its enemies ; have raised the spirit of the country, which is often too easily agitated and alarmed.

The constitution will bear many shocks ; it has a vigour in its own principle. Property is likewise

so distributed in this country, and substantial blessings so generally diffused, and all have such a deep interest at stake in their possessions, or in their civil and religious liberty, that little of serious disturbance is to be apprehended from the noise and bustle of some insignificant individuals and clubs, though all circumspection should certainly be exerted.

Let the Government manifest its due authority, and exercise its legitimate powers. If evil-minded men renew the steps which took place some years since, Ministers should renew the measures, and imitate the vigour and decided conduct, of Mr. Pitt, before misguided multitudes are hurried to mischief and destruction: “*Habemus enim senatus consultum vehemens et grave; non deest Reipublicæ concilium, neque auctoritas hujus ordinis!*”

I am no advocate for the present Administration; I am totally independent of, and unconnected with them, and have nothing to hope for or fear at their hands; but their mistakes have been much exaggerated. That there are men of considerable talents among them, and of distinguished probity, I am convinced; and I have no fear that, if fairly treated, they would weather the storms under which they are compelled to sail, and conduct the vessel of the state into a safe and honourable port.—I would, upon this occasion, address them in the words of Cicero;

“ Quapropter de summâ salute vestrâ populique,
 “ de vestris conjugibus et liberis, de aris ac focis,
 “ de fanis et templis, de totius urbis tectis ac
 “ sedibus, de imperio, de libertate, de salute de-
 “ nique universæ Reipublicæ, decernite diligenter
 “ ut instituistis ac fortiter ;”—and I shall conclude
 with recommending to you to withdraw yourself
 from evil advisers and associates, and to relinquish
 your hazardous schemes of innovation ; to act
 consistently with your station in life, and to devote
 your mind rather to curb the licentious spirit of
 turbulent and disaffected multitudes, than to de-
 spoil Parliament of its privileges and the State of
 its security, and to labour, in conjunction with
 the true friends of your country, to uphold the
 only constitution in Europe under which freedom
 is matured, and to protect it as well from the
 effects of internal dissension as of external ene-
 mies.

THE END.



